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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CG](#)  
SUBJECT: DEATH OF JEANNOT BEMBA SAOLANA

¶1. (SBU) DRC senator and businessman Jeannot Bemba Saolona, father of opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba, died of cardiac arrest in Brussels on July 1. Local media in Kinshasa announced the death of Bemba, a former Minister of Economy during the 2003-2006 transition and ex-head of the DRC chamber of commerce.

¶2. (SBU) Jean Pollet (alias Jeannot Bemba Saolona) was born in Libenge, Equateur, on September 3, 1941. A trusted friend of former president Joseph Mobutu, he began commercial activities in coffee export and later in air transport. He created the coffee processing venture SCIBE ("Societe Commerciale et Industrielle Bemba" in French) and the transport company SCIBE Air-Lift. He was also active in the car rental and air-taxi service and had interests in the palm and cocoa industries.

¶3. (SBU) Bemba served as chairman of multiple companies: the oil storage company Zaire-SEP, the furniture manufacturer FNMA, and the parastatals SOGEGROS and SOGEDETAIL. He was also chairman of the Zairean company Kreglinger and Zaire Wild Life Tours (ZWT). Bemba served as chairman of the Zairean chamber of commerce, now called the FEC ("Federation des Entreprises du Congo" in French).

¶4. (SBU) Bemba was arrested when Mobutu was overthrown in 1997 and then released by then president Laurent Kabila. Allegedly after making a "contribution" to Kabila, he was appointed Minister of Economy. He was elected senator representing the MLC ("Movement de Liberation du Congo" in French) in 2007. Although a powerful figure in DRC commercial circles, Bemba, except for his stint as Minister of Economy, generally eschewed direct involvement in politics. He even publicly disavowed his son's armed opposition to the Kabila regime, undoubtedly earning him the right to pursue his business interests unhindered.

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